‘I’ versus ‘We’

By Joshua D. Glawson

There is a distinction between ‘I’ and ‘we.’ As simple as that is, the conflation and often intentional distortion of the two terms are an ongoing phenomena. Whether it be through a specific organization, ideology, religion, philosophy, political affiliation, etc., the boundaries are constantly pushed between these two terms. It is not that every instance of the use of ‘I’ and ‘we’ challenges the limitations to these terms, rather it is that it is imperative to recognize their innate and distinct differences.

All persons act from their origin of mental inception, which is within the self, also known as the ‘ego’ or the ‘I.’ This ‘ego’ is not that it negates the other *selves* or ‘I’s within the world, it is just that one’s own life and wellbeing is ultimately one’s own responsibility, most simplistically put. When I think, when I act, I engage intentionally within the self and within the world. People may differ on their levels of engagement or capabilities, but they nevertheless intentionally think and act if they are a person. Each person acts according to their own will.

Various groups of ethics, religions, philosophies, etc., may want to limit the capacity of the ‘I’ in relation to other ‘I’s and will revert to ad hominems, coercion, or ad verecundiam in order to quash the ‘ego.’ These schools of thought tend towards deriding the ‘I’ because they want to guide each

person according to *their* will or the will of their acclaimed leaders and respective philosophy.

To suggest that a person is not their own is an attempt at enslaving that person's will to that of the imposer. Slavery is not merely forced labor, it is the robbing of another's personage in suggesting that they do not have the capacity to truly act on their own will or that they do not have the right to do so. Most of the schools of thought that attack the ego are not so forward or brash. Instead, they usually begin with incrementally creating doubt within the self about general notions of perception, willpower, epistemology, and ethics.

These schools of thought might suggest you do not really exist; you cannot see the *actual* world; you do not really act on your own will; what's yours is not really *yours*; ultimate truth and knowledge are not present in the real world, rather it is a "spiritual" realm or otherworldly experience that holds these truths or knowledge; we are in this together; you are a bad person if you do not follow; it is not about you, but everyone. They may chant, "There's no 'I' in 'Team.'"

Contrastingly, the elite of these schools of thought have ultimate power and capability- they have a will of their own because it conforms to their ideas and percepts; they have the ability to guide the dispersion of *property*; they have the ability to know and to know truth; they are superiorly privy to know or have experienced the *higher other realm* outside of the commonly

perceived world; they are horned with superior knowledge; they are the righteous directors for the collective; their adherence to this philosophy grants them *legitimate authority* to negate the will of individuals who may differ, question, or stray. Of course, these elites adhere to and uphold an unsigned contract on behalf of others, and can intercede and enforce on others' behalf in this covenant of sorts.

Facetiousness aside, these groups intend on blurring the distinction between the 'I' and the 'we' in order to pursue their sought ends. They declare, "There is no 'I' in Team," yet they fail to realize there is no team unless there is first recognition of the 'I.' To suggest a 'team' is not comprised of willful autonomous individuals, rather that it is an anthropomorphized will that supersedes the individuals that literally comprise it, is not only outright fallacious it is by definition no longer a "team." 'Teamwork' *requires* participating individuals in order to have a decent chance at succeeding and to hold its definition, but that "requirement" does not necessitate the use of coercion. A 'team' would also have to be participants that are aware of and accepting of their participation, but again this '*have to'* does not necessitate that it be obligated by use of coercion.

There is the 'I,' which can be called the 'ego.' There is also a 'you,' or 'thou.' Additionally, there is a word that recognizes a third person or group of others. However, there are varying forms of 'we.' The first form of 'we' is pluralis logicus. This first form is the more logical form of the word 'we,' for

example two people walking together may say, “We are walking together.” If building something together, they may say, “We are working together.”

The second form of ‘we’ is pluralis gloriosus. This form of ‘we’ evokes a glorification of a group identity, such as saying, “We Americans are the best at basketball.” Of course the person saying this does not necessarily mean that they are automatically among the best in the world at basketball merely because they identify as being a part of the American group. If they mean that because they are a part of a group identity and that this does automatically make them among the best at basketball, they are only fooling themselves and the poor minds that believe such things. This ‘we’ of glorification of a group identity may also take pride in particular characteristics, ethics, or traits held by these groups. It can easily be seen that pluralis gloriosus can encompass people unaware of their being a part of that group, unwillingly a part of that group, or not even possessing of those perceived characteristics, ethics, or traits.

The third form of ‘we’ is that of pluralis majestatis. This form of ‘we’ is often written in uppercase as “We” as it is the traditional Royal We. This ‘We’ is the personified voice of the will of an authority’s people. In reality it is the single will of an individual who speaks on behalf of others as this individual believes they have the legitimate authority to hold their own will at highest authority.

The fourth form of ‘we’ is pluralis imperialis. This form of ‘we’ takes the imperialistic approach to enforcing the pluralis gloriosus. This ‘we’ attempts to coercively enforce the perceived shared glorified characteristic, ethic, or trait. This coercion may be direct or indirect, through social pressures, through government, through manipulation, through laws, and more.

An individual may hold differing values from other people, different from other groups, or even conflicting values within themselves. A person may want to work with others, or they may only enjoy working with certain types of people, they may be a loner, or they may wish to work in groups. There are many factors and a plethora of possibilities, but either way each person is an individual and only individuals think and act. Each individual is an ‘I’ and their relation to a group may be recognized by themselves or by others, but this does not automatically require that they should be coerced into working within that group or with anyone for that matter; this individual may also reject the group(s) altogether.

Once the ‘I’ is supplanted by the ‘we,’ individuals should not passively accept the terms given. By being cognizant of the differences between the ‘I’ and the various forms of ‘we,’ an individual is better equipped at recognizing the simple contrast between the two terms and when the terms are conflated. Where the terms are conflated and philosophically shrouded, danger or the potential for it is often lurking.

Works Cited

Mises, L. von. (1949). *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (The Scholar's Edition) (2008). Ludwig von Mises Institute.